

## Study 8

# A Painful Goodbye

## Deuteronomy 31

Saying goodbye is often painful. In this case even more so, as Moses appoints his successor to lead Israel into the promised land...

Read Deuteronomy 31:1-8, and feel the sadness as Moses hands over the leadership of Israel to Joshua. He says the same thing to the Israelites as he does to Joshua (v6 and v 7-9) – “Be strong and courageous; the Lord your God goes with you, he will never leave you or forsake you.”

- a) Why can Moses be sure of this? (v7)
- b) Moses writes down the law, and commands the priests to read it to the people every seventh year. What do their children need to learn (v13)?

It's almost time for Moses to die - God tells him so in Deuteronomy 31:14. Then he gives him a glimpse of what lies ahead for Israel. It's bad news!

- c) What are they going to do? (v16)
- d) What will happen to Israel then? (v17)
- e) God gives Moses a song to teach the Israelites. We'll see the lyrics in chapter 32. What's the purpose of the song, according to verses 19 and 20?
- f) Moses writes down all the words of the law, from beginning to end, in a book, which he gives to the Levites. What will the Law be, according to verse 26?

Interesting – right from the beginning, the Law is a ‘witness *against* Israel.’ Right from the beginning, it’s the book of what should have been and what could have been... but right from the beginning God knows they’ll choose death and destruction rather than life! Life for Israel is never going to come from the law... it will have to come some other way!

### **Sing along with God**

God has told Moses to write down the words of his song – and they’re the words you’ll see in Deuteronomy chapter 32.

g) Read verses 3 to 6. How would you summarise what the song is saying?

The song goes on to talk about the way God chose Israel, and shielded and guarded ‘him’ through the desert wilderness. (The Old Testament often speaks of the nation of Israel as God’s precious ‘son’.)

In verse 21, God says Israel made him ‘jealous’ by gods that are not really gods. So he’s going to make them envious by a people that’s not really a people!

h) The Apostle Paul quotes these words in Romans 10:19 and 11:11, 13-14. Non-Jews everywhere are putting their trust in Jesus. What does Paul hope this will do for the Jews?

Because of their unfaithfulness in the land, God is going to bring all kinds of calamities on Israel, including famines and pests and plagues – but verses 26 and 27 of Deuteronomy 32 bring a change of direction. He would scatter them and blot out their memory for ever... except for one thing.

i) What is it?

j) Much later, when all this has happened, the prophet Ezekiel picks up the same idea. **Read Ezekiel 36:19-27**. What is God concerned for?

God is concerned that other nations will think they are stronger than he is! He’s concerned for his own Holy reputation. So ultimately, God is going to do all the work! He’s going to bring them back from the nations, he’s going to wash them clean from their sins, and he’s going to give them his Spirit. The way he’s going to do it is by

sending his son, Jesus... and it's all for the sake of his Holy reputation! (That's actually what Jesus was praying when he said "Hallowed be your name"!)

### **The end of the Song**

The song God gave to Moses in Deuteronomy 32 is a long and painful one. Israel is a nation without sense (v28) – they should have known better. God will justly judge them, and challenge their idols to help them. But the song ends on a note of hope for Israel.

- k. What's the glimmer of good news in verse 39?
- l. How will God 'bring to life' and 'heal' his people according to verse 43?
- m. How (and when) do you think this 'atonement' happens?
- n. Moses finishes reciting his song of warning to all of Israel. How are Israel to treat these words? (v47)

God tells Moses to climb Mount Nebo, where he will glimpse the promised land from a distance. Then he'll die. It's tough. But God told him this would happen, because of the way Moses dishonoured him back in the desert of Zin!

### **A Final Blessing from Moses**

Moses blesses the Israelites, tribe by tribe in Deuteronomy 33, much as Jacob blessed his sons back in Genesis 49. His final words are very positive – **read them in verse 29.**

What incredible privileges do the Israelites have?

In **Deuteronomy 34**, God takes Moses to the top of Mount Nebo, where you can look right down a valley at the rolling hills of the promised land. Author Morgan Spurlock visited Mount Nebo recently, and describes the view like this:

"Moses ... certainly had a breathtaking view. We stood facing west, looking out across the valley, rumpled and brown. To the north, our right it was cut by the glinting ribbon of the Jordan River, the border of modern Jordan and Israel. Straight ahead, the northern tip of the Dead Sea glistened. Bethlehem and Hebron were over on the left somewhere, just beyond the haze that rose from the hills on the Dead Sea's western shore... Jerusalem was on the horizon just about due west of us, Jericho stood at the northern tip of the Dead Sea a little to our right

and further in that direction lay the troubled West Bank. (Where in the World is Osama Bin Laden, p 114,) In short, it's a place where you can take in the whole sweep of the promised land. Sadly, that view is all Moses is going to get.

Sadly, Moses dies there in Moab, outside the promised land, just as God had said he would. It's the end of the story of Moses... and the beginning of the story of Joshua, his successor. But nobody could ever really fill the shoes of Moses. **Read verses 10 to 12.**

- o. It was true. Nobody else ever had the mighty power Moses had – or performed such awesome deeds – until Jesus came. **Read John 1:17.** The law Moses brought was good – but what is far better?

### **Looking back**

That brings us to the end of our quick look at Deuteronomy. What have you learned along the way?

People might say a book like Deuteronomy has nothing to teach Christians today. How would you respond?

### **Your Feedback...**

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